

*Adrienne R. Smith, Director of the New Leaders Academy of the National Youth Employment Coalition, presented the following remarks at the Youth Development Practitioner Apprenticeship Implementation Grantee Meeting on November 28, 2001. For more information on the Youth Development Practitioner Apprenticeship Implementation Grants Program, contact Mary Rosenthal, (202) 693-3602 or email: [mrosenthal@doleta.gov](mailto:mrosenthal@doleta.gov).*

## **Skill-Building for Professionals in the Youth Development Field**

By Adrienne R. Smith

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The New Leaders Academy of the National Youth Employment Coalition (NYEC) was established in 1998 to identify promising youth employment/youth development professional staff from throughout the country, and provide them with information, education, support and training to become the next generation of leaders. NYEC develops training modules and curriculum to address the needed skills and competencies for New Leaders group study, development of an Individual Development Plan and provides a year-long program of support along with a Career Advisor for each New Leader.

NYEC undertook development of training for emerging leaders of youth-serving organizations in order to ready our society with skilled and knowledgeable directors of youth organizations. Our efforts are urgent and our combined efforts in the youth employment field to prepare a new generation of workers will help to ensure that leaders of youth organizations are prepared to take the helm in the next few years.

Our field needs a well-qualified pool of workers to assume leadership roles of youth-serving organizations around the country. The benefit of such training and support has the potential to unleash energy and creativity of directors who will, in future, possess a positive, resourceful approach to young people. In addition, we need opportunities that bring individuals together as a network to share and promote effective practice and to broaden relationships with others in communities to influence youth policies and resource allocation.

The New Leaders Academy seeks to impact the youth employment at three levels: the individual, his/her organization and the field of youth employment. At the individual level, the goals of the New Leaders Academy are to 1) expose New Leaders to the current range of knowledge and expertise in research, policy, and practice regarding youth employment/youth development, 2) expose New Leaders to the range of career opportunities

within the field and enhance their management and organizational development skills and 3) enable New Leaders to establish or broaden relationships with national, state, and local youth employment/development policymakers and practitioners, program operators, and research and policy analysis organizations.

At the organizational level, New Leaders Academy encourages its participants to research and document best practices and, when feasible, implement these at their organization. We expected and have found that New Leaders have an impact on their organizations through training of other staff and in taking on greater responsibilities in their current positions. New Leaders' supervisors substantiate the growth of their employees through improved communication and interpersonal skills.

Finally, an essential characteristic of our work is the creation of a cadre of professionals who are connected as a network and committed to improved practice in the field of youth employment and youth development. We understand that no single act or program achieves the result of connecting people. Yet, New Leaders Academy and staff training and development programs can contribute to youth workers' realization that there are others committed to youth work and improving outcomes for young people and their families.

The Academy for Educational Development conducted a series of evaluations in 1999 of the New Leaders Academy through New Leaders' self-reports of growth as well as reports from their supervisors. Interestingly, there are parallels between New Leaders' self-reports and the observations of growth of their supervisors. AED's survey of supervisors indicated the expected benefit of participation in the New Leaders' Academy to be staff development and professional growth, networking with other organizations and the sharing of knowledge with others in the organization. One supervisor noted, "We hope to benefit by having the New Leader bring back to our organization the latest information from the youth field." Another supervisor talked of the expectation of developing stronger connections to other national youth service organizations. The personal growth that supervisors observe in their employees includes managerial skill development (cited most frequently), a greater sense of confidence, a heightened sense of a "national outlook," expanded content knowledge and a greater sense of professionalism. Managerial skills that supervisors cite include: demonstrating leadership; decision-making; delegating responsibility; inter-agency collaboration; political sensitivity; resourcefulness; long-range planning; people skills; and follow-through.

As for changes at the organizational level, supervisors see that specific positive changes also occur as a result of their employees' participation in the Academy. One supervisor stated, "We all got promoted through NLA. She

shared info with other staff and brought her peers along with her.” NYEC also expects that the result of individual training is not just for the benefit of a single person but that it benefits co-workers of New Leaders as well.

New Leaders themselves are more likely to cite personal rather than professional changes. Yet, many of the personal changes they experience have a direct effect on their professional lives. Nearly all New Leaders of the Class of 1999 cited personal growth in the areas of:

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|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| -increase in confidence       | -trust instincts more         |
| -better informed              | -more assertive               |
| -feel valued by peers         | -more competent and committed |
| -sense of accomplishment      | -more vocal                   |
| -better understanding of self | -more focused                 |

By far the most frequently-cited response from supervisors on New Leaders’ growth is their employees’ greater sense of the need for networking with others and other agencies in the community, collaboration in order to share knowledge and practice, and New Leaders’ increase in knowledge of the political processes within their own communities. Supervisors also state that their employees gain an understanding of the need for professional development and growth; a better understanding of youth development principles; as well as a better understanding of their own organization’s mission and purpose.

The full impact of New Leaders Academy and of training and development for youth workers on the field is yet to be determined. It is our expectation that stronger networks and sharing of effective strategies to improve the lives of young people will result in further contributions to the field. NYEC will be measuring that impact and determining ways to distribute the lessons from the Study Groups in order to help make this contribution.

We know that work and education programs can provide the best developmental opportunities for young people. These can also be the opportunities of greatest value to adults who work with youth. Not only do training and support increase our collective capacity to better serve young people. Training also can provide some assurance there will be adults in the future who like working with youth but who are also knowledgeable and possess the skills needed to do so.

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